

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims:

1 – 13 (Canceled)

14. (New) An apparatus for forming and securing a loop handle in a tubular covering for an item to be packaged, and for use with a conveyor assembly for conveying the item to be packaged from a first selected position to an upper end of a hereinafter identified chute, said apparatus comprising:

a frame for supporting said apparatus and for engaging a support surface;

a chute carried by said frame, wherein said chute is adapted for receiving the tubular covering and maintaining an end of said tubular covering in an open position whereby the item to be packaged engages the tubular covering at a distal end of said chute;

a voider assembly carried by said frame proximate said chute, said voider assembly including a pair of voider gates defined by a stationary set of voider gates and a moveable set of voider gates, wherein each set of voider gates is defined by voider plates, the voider plates of each gates having an opening that is adapted to be positioned so as to substantially register with said chute when said voider plates are in an open position, wherein said stationary voider gate is positioned proximate said distal end of the chute, and said moveable voider gate is selectively moveable between an extended position so

as to be in spaced relation from said stationary voider gate and a retracted position so as to be positioned proximate said stationary voider gate, further wherein said stationary and said moveable voider gates are adapted to gather said tubular covering when said voider plates are in a closed position thereby forming an elongated gathered cord;

a product restrainer assembly carried by said frame, for receiving the item to be packaged as the item to be packaged exits said chute and passes through said voider assembly;

a handle formation assembly carried by said frame for engaging a portion of said gathered cord of tubular covering disposed between said stationary voider gate and said moveable voider gate and forming said gathered cord into a loop handle; and

clipper mechanisms carried by said frame in spaced relation from said handle formation assembly, for engaging said loop handle defined in said gathered cord of tubular covering and for securing at least a first clip and a second clip to said gathered cord for securing an open end of said tubular covering for the item to be packaged, and for securing said loop handle,

wherein said clipper mechanisms are further adapted for severing said gathered cord of tubular covering at a point disposed between said first and second clips.

15. (New) The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said item to be packaged is a food product.

16. (New) The apparatus of claim 15 wherein said item to be packaged is a poultry product.
17. (New) The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said apparatus further comprises a conveyor belt for conveying the product to be packaged towards said chute.
18. (New) The apparatus of claim 17 wherein said conveyor belt is motor driven.
19. (New) The apparatus of claim 17 wherein said apparatus intersects a production line and said conveyor belt conveys the product to be packaged from the production line to said chute.
20. (New) The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said chute is inclined so as to have an upper end proximate said conveyor assembly and further wherein said distal end defines a lower end, whereby the item to be packaged will travel through said chute under the force of gravity.
21. (New) The apparatus of claim 20 wherein said chute includes ridges disposed along the length of said chute for substantially preventing rotation of the item to be packaged.
22. (New) The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said product restrainer assembly includes a slide plate, and the product restrainer assembly catches the item to be packaged as said item to be packaged exits said chute and allows discharge of item to be packaged.

23. (New) The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said openings in the top and bottom voider plates include bites that cooperate, and register, when said voider plates are in a closed position, to form a narrow channel whereby said tubular covering is gathered into said gathered cord.

24. (New) The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said handle forming assembly includes a handle formation jaw, actuated by a jaw actuator, said handle formation jaw being carried by an elongated rod actuated by a cylinder, said handle forming assembly further including a rotary actuator for rotating said handle formation jaw through a range of approximately one hundred and eighty degrees.

25. (New) The apparatus of claim 14 wherein said clipping mechanisms are configured with first and second clip rail assemblies.

26. (New) An apparatus for forming and securing a loop handle in a tubular covering for an item to be packaged, said apparatus comprising:

a frame for supporting said apparatus and for engaging a support surface;

a chute carried by said frame, wherein said chute is adapted for receiving the tubular covering and maintaining an end of said tubular covering in an open position whereby the item to be packaged engages the tubular covering at a distal end of said chute;

a voider assembly carried by said frame proximate said chute, said voider assembly including a pair of voider gates defined by a stationary set of voider gates and a moveable set of voider gates, the voider gates each having an opening that is adapted to be

positioned so as to substantially register with said chute when said voider gates are in an open position, wherein said stationary voider gate is positioned proximate said distal end of the chute, and said moveable voider gate is selectively moveable between an extended position so as to be in spaced relation from said stationary voider gate and a retracted position so as to be positioned proximate said stationary voider gate, further wherein said stationary and said moveable voider gates are adapted to gather said tubular covering when said voider gates are in a closed position thereby forming an elongated gathered cord;

a product restrainer assembly carried by said frame, for receiving the item to be packaged as the item to be packaged exits said chute and passes through said voider assembly;

a handle formation assembly carried by said frame for engaging a portion of said gathered cord of tubular covering disposed between said stationary voider gate and said moveable voider gate and forming said gathered cord into a loop handle; and

clipper mechanisms carried by said frame in spaced relation from said handle formation assembly, for engaging said loop handle defined in said gathered cord of tubular covering and for securing at least a first clip and a second clip to said gathered cord for securing an open end of said tubular covering for the item to be packaged, and for securing said loop handle.

27. (New) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein said item to be packaged is a food product.

28. (New) The apparatus of claim 27 wherein said item to be packaged is a poultry product.

29. (New) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein said apparatus further comprises a conveyor assembly for conveying the item to be packaged from a first selected position to said upper end of said chute, including a belt for conveying the product to be packaged towards said chute.

30. (New) The apparatus of claim 29 wherein said conveyor belt is motor driven.

31. (New) The apparatus of claim 29 wherein said apparatus intersects a production line and said conveyor belt conveys the product to be packaged from the production line to said chute.

32. (New) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein said chute is inclined so as to have an upper end proximate said conveyor assembly and further wherein said distal end defines a lower end, whereby the item to be packaged will travel through said chute under the force of gravity.

33. (New) The apparatus of claim 32 wherein said chute includes ridges disposed along the length of said chute for substantially preventing rotation of the item to be packaged.

34. (New) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein said product restrainer assembly includes a slide plate, and the product restrainer assembly catches the item to be packaged as said item to be packaged exits said chute and allows discharge of item to be packaged.

35. (New) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein said openings in the top and bottom voider gates include bites that cooperate, and register, when said voider gates are in a closed position, to form a narrow channel whereby said tubular covering is gathered into said gathered cord.

36. (New) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein said handle forming assembly includes a handle formation jaw, actuated by a jaw actuator, said handle formation jaw being carried by an elongated rod actuated by a cylinder, said handle forming assembly further including a rotary actuator for rotating said handle formation jaw.

37. (New) The apparatus of claim 26 wherein said clipping mechanisms are configured with first and second clip rail assemblies.

38. (New) An apparatus for forming and securing a loop handle in a tubular covering for an item to be packaged;

and for use with a frame for supporting said apparatus and for engaging a support surface, a voider assembly carried by said frame adapted to gather said tubular covering thereby forming an elongated gathered cord, a product restrainer assembly carried by said frame, for receiving the item to be packaged as the item to be packaged passes through said voider assembly;

said apparatus comprising:

a handle formation assembly adapted to be carried by a frame for engaging a portion of a gathered cord of tubular covering and forming said gathered cord into a loop handle, said handle forming assembly including a handle formation jaw, a jaw actuator for actuating the jaw, an elongated rod actuated by a cylinder for carrying said handle formation jaw, said handle formation assembly further including a rotary actuator for rotating said handle formation jaw to form said loop handle.

39. (New) An apparatus as in claim 38 further comprising:

clipper mechanisms adapted to be carried by a frame in spaced relation from said handle formation assembly, for engaging said loop handle defined in said gathered cord of tubular covering and for securing at least a first clip and a second clip to said gathered cord for securing an open end of said tubular covering for the item to be packaged, and for securing said loop handle.